Gloucester Chef Ken Duckworth Uses His Culinary Skills to Feed People in Need

This story originally appeared on the blog of The Open Door (https://www.foodpantry.org/the-door-chronicles/posts/2021/december/reowned-local-chef-lends-a-hand-in-the-open-door-kitchen/).
Amid upbeat rock and pop music, sturdy kitchen appliances and a handful of dedicated staff, these days you’ll find renowned local Chef Ken Duckworth busily at work in The Open Door kitchen, a program of hunger-fighting nonprofit The Open Door.

Duckworth joined The Open Door’s kitchen team part-time this September, and helps prepare more than 160 meals a day, three times a week in The Open Door Community Meals program. He has seamlessly fallen into stride with longtime kitchen staff Kenn Taber, Joe Porcaro and Sarah Columbaro, all of whom are led by Director of Operations Jen Perry.

“This is the only job I’ve ever known, and to use my trade and craft in this completely different way is soul-satisfying,” he said. Ken’s been able to use his training and experience to inspire and support The Open Door staff but primarily, Duckworth joined the kitchen team to cook, hands-on.

“I’ve always worked in high-end resorts and restaurants, no industrial kitchens, so this is very different than what I am used to,” he added. “To be able to share my knowledge of cooking to partner with what The Open Door does feels good.”

He’s helped “trim the sails” by streamlining processes, he says. Duckworth also prepares signature dishes like empanadas and focuses on Healthy Choice Easy Choice options. Since 2014, the Healthy Choice Easy Choice initiative has transformed less popular and oversized veggies into family-friendly nutritious meals, both partially and fully prepped.

**Family history**

Duckworth has a long history with The Open Door. For more than 10 years, he has volunteered with the Community Meals program during the Holiday season. His wife, Nicole, and children Emma, age 19, and Ben, age 16, have helped too. In the coming years he hopes his youngest children, Jude, age 8, and George, age 6, can join in on the tradition.

“I want them to have awareness and be mindful of the situation here, and the folks that The Open Door serves,” Ken Duckworth said. “They need to be tuned into that.”
Nicole Duckworth has also been a dedicated volunteer throughout the pandemic, and delivered groceries and meals to clients weekly for over a year. Today she still picks up shifts when an extra driver is needed.

“We are a lucky community to have Ken Duckworth making magic in the kitchen,” The Open Door President and CEO Julie LaFontaine said. “He joins our seasoned team at a mission-critical moment on the path to better health outcomes through access to good food. His lived experience will carry forward the established culinary goals and objectives of the organization by leading the ‘Healthy Choice Easy Choice’ initiative. His style and vision align with the organization’s core values, bringing a spirit of community and stability to the kitchen as we stand at the gate of a new year ready to serve.”

The Duckworth family’s connection to The Open Door started in February 2004, when Ken met LaFontaine. The Boston restaurant he’d worked for at the time, Maison Robert, was closing and donating equipment to The Open Door. In October 2004 Duckworth’s Bistrot opened in Gloucester, and soon after Ken and his family started volunteering to prepare and serve holiday meals each year.

“It’s always heartwarming when a family volunteers together,” LaFontaine said. “We look forward to seeing the Duckworths each year.”
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